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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 000353

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SUBJECT: NEW HEALTH MINISTER CALLS FOR CONTINUED COOPERATION

REF: ASTANA 2051

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In his introductory meeting with newly appointed Minister of Health Anatoliy Dernovoy, the Ambassador reaffirmed that close cooperation in the health sector remains an important Embassy priority. Dernovoy reacted positively, stating that he hopes for continued collaboration. Dernovoy, who replaced Yerbolat Dosayev as Minister of Health after 76 children in Shymkent were infected with HIV due to an unsafe blood supply and poor transfusion practices, said that Kazakhstan is committed to ensuring that its blood centers meet international standards. The Ambassador informed Dernovoy that two of the infected children from Shymkent were adopted by Americans, and that one of the adopting families was criminally denied necessary information about the health of their child. Turning to DTRA health-related projects, Minister Dernovoy asked his staff to help expedite a long-delayed strain transfer. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador, accompanied by Embassy representatives from USAID, CDC, and DTRA, told newly appointed health minister Anatoliy Dernovoy during their introductory meeting on October 28 that the USG values the close relationship it has established with the Ministry of Health. The Ambassador, noting the excellent partnership between the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Kazakhstan, told Dernovoy that post hoped to get funding to create a new regional center for disease control in Kazakhstan. Dernovoy thanked the Ambassador for the USG's long history of support. He added that he hopes that the cooperation will continue, even if USG funding decreases.

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HIV/AIDS: Preventing Future Outbreaks  
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¶3. (U) HIV/AIDS was a primary topic of discussion; Dernovoy replaced Yerbolat Dosayev as Minister of Health after one of Kazakhstan's worst-ever health tragedies, an HIV/AIDS outbreak in Shymkent in which 76 children were infected as a result of poor blood safety and infection control practices (reftel). CDC Director for Central Asia Michael Favorov summarized CDC efforts in Shymkent. He told Dernovoy that he is confident that the outbreak has been localized. According to Favorov, all children in the targeted risk group have been tested and the rate of new incidence should not exceed five percent.

¶4. (SBU) Dernovoy acknowledged that Kazakhstan blood safety and security practices need to improve. The recent inspection of all

Kazakhstan blood centers has demonstrated that the facilities are in poor shape and badly equipped, he said. Kazakhstan's 2007-2008 health program, according to Dernovoy, will address these issues in order to ensure that Kazakhstani blood centers meet international standards. He also noted that the Ministry of Health will release a statement affirming that all necessary steps have been taken in Shymkent to prevent the further spread of HIV/AIDS and that the deaths of eight HIV-infected children was caused by pre-existing conditions and not by AIDS.

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HIV-Positive Children Adopted by American Citizens  
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15. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that American citizens have adopted two of the children infected with HIV. In one of the cases, the child's infection was not revealed to the adopting parents. They were instead told that the child was in good health, even though the child had tested positive for HIV. The Ambassador called the actions criminal and gave to Minister Dernovoy materials connected with the case.

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USAID Health Program  
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16. (U) Kerry Pelzman, USAID Central Asia Director of Health and Education, described the role of USAID's ZdravPlus II program in assisting to develop and implement Kazakhstan's 2004 State Program for Health Reform and Development. She also highlighted USAID's support for Kazakhstan's tuberculosis control programs, including multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. The Ambassador assured Dernovoy that these projects will remain key priorities for the Embassy, despite a likely reduction in funding.

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DTRA Programs, Strain Transfer  
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17. (SBU) The Ambassador then briefed Dernovoy on Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA's) heightened focus on health sector projects. The ambassador pointed out that a plague strain transfer between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Kazakh Scientific Center for Quarantine and Zoonotic Disease (KSCQZD) has been long delayed due to a misperception that the U.S. Government had not performed work under the Biological Threat Reduction program (BTRP). He said that the USG has taken several steps to demonstrate its commitment, including the construction of a laboratory for the Ministry of Agriculture in Astana.

18. (SBU) DTRA Office Chief Laura Smiley also urged the Minister to help facilitate the strain transfer, noting that the project had been delayed for two years, and that it was not a DOD program, but a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and KSCQZD. Anatoliy Belonog (Chief Sanitary-Epidemiological Doctor for GOK) said that a political decision regarding specifically export licenses must be made on the strain transfer and that he would brief the Minister. The Ambassador reminded Belonog that Minister of Industry and Trade Vladimir Shkolnik had promised during Senator Lugar's August visit to facilitate any export license applications that would be submitted. Dernovoy asked Belonog to expedite the paperwork.

19. (SBU) Smiley informed Dernovoy that the Joint Requirements Implementation Plan (JRIP) for the BTRP was still awaiting Kazakhstani government signature. (Note: the JRIP is a non-binding agreement between USG and GOK acknowledging roles and responsibilities for the BTRP.) Belonog replied that additional interagency coordination was required on the 2007 schedule. Dernovoy instructed Belonog to ensure that an updated plan would be ready for signature by the time the U.S. BTRP team arrives in mid-December. Belonog asked Smiley to participate in upcoming meetings with the interagency working group in November to ensure that all JRIP edits and comments would be passed to the USG team

before their visit. Smiley mentioned that the U.S. Government was on track to award several laboratory construction contracts in the coming months, including Almaty, Uralsk, and Kyzylorda. She asked that the Ministry of Health expedite its decision regarding the U.S. Government's request to build a joint veterinary-human epidemiological monitoring station in Kyzylorda. Minister Dernovoy asked Belonog brief him on the topic after the meeting.

¶10. (SBU) Biographical Note: Anatoliy Dernovoy served as Director of the Presidential Medical Center from 1996 to 2006. He previously served as Deputy Minister of Health and State Chief Sanitary Doctor (1994 - 1996) and Chief Sanitary Doctor of Almaty Oblast (1991-1994). Dernovoy was born in Karaganda in 1951 and holds a PhD in Medical Sciences from the Karaganda Medical Institute.

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